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## Tracking Change in Northern Ireland Policing: Temporal Phases and Key Themes

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## **Tracking Change in Northern Ireland Policing: Temporal Phases and Key Themes**

### **Introduction**

The study of organisational change in policing has tended to focus on structural alteration (Maquire, Shin et al. 2003), policy implementation (Schuchart 2004, 2012) or considerations of internal organisational culture (Zhao, He et al. 1999). This paper adds to this literature by offering a processual perspective on a 'high stakes' policing change process intertwined with a rapidly evolving external environment: the radical change within policing in Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Belfast or 'Good Friday' Agreement. By seeking to 'temporally bracket' (Smith and Elliott 2007, Buchanan and Denyer 2013, Langley, Smallman et al. 2013) the change into four phases and utilising a 'conjunctural reasoning' approach, it strives to unravel the relationship between internal change processes, external change drivers and the decisions of diverse organisational actors (Plowman, Baker et al. 2007, Buchanan and Denyer 2013). The next section gives a brief review of that context and the complexity of the situation faced by those formulating a strategy for change within the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) as it moved into a new era as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). It sketches the origins of the organisation itself and the political developments that lead to the change process.

### **Environmental Context and Organisational Origins**

The challenges posed to the RUC at the beginning of this process of change were deeply rooted in the background, culture, politics and identity of the organisation and Northern Ireland's challenges as a divided society. The history of policing in this region is a long one, and begins with the creation of the new Royal Ulster Constabulary in June 1922 after the disbandment of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the partition of Ireland (Brewer and Hume 1996). The battle over national identity between British identifying Unionists and Irish identifying Nationalists has

determined the history of Northern Ireland since, and is nowhere more apparent than in the journey of NI policing. While there may have been an initial concern for balanced religious composition in the early years of the new force, this quickly gave way to partisan representation with Catholic membership reaching a stable peak at 17% in the late 1920's. However by the onset of the extended period of violence, colloquially known as 'the Troubles' in the late 1960's, it had dropped again to a little over 10% (Brewer and Magee 1991). Brewer comments that the political pattern of 'dominant-subordinate' relationships developing in Northern Ireland turned the Force into 'the armed wing of unionism'. Throughout the 1960's and 70's various attempts at reform came to nothing and an increase in violence and disorder saw the presence of British troops on the streets from 1969. The introduction of internment (administrative detention) in 1971 reduced still further the acceptability of the police in the eyes of the minority Catholic community, as flawed intelligence resulted in the widespread round-up of suspects. As Mulcahy has observed:

*'Policing itself constituted a major axis of division, and shaped the social and political landscape within which it operated'* (Mulcahy 2006:3)

The Cost of the Troubles Survey (COTT) calculated that by 3 December 1997, 3,585 people had been killed in the Northern Ireland conflict since 1969 (Fay and INCORE 2001). Within the RUC, 302 officers were murdered up to 1999 and over 8,500 injured as a result of terrorist activity. Often quoted Interpol figures published in the International Criminal Police Review in 1983 showed that NI was the most dangerous place in the world to be a policeman. It was twice as dangerous as in El Salvador, where the risk factor was next highest (Ryder 2000). Policing itself, during the 'Troubles' was characterised by a high measure of secrecy; security and an obvious military approach (Mulcahy 2006). For those from a Catholic background, membership of the RUC was extremely low, with only 7.7% of members Catholic in 1992 (ICPNI 1999).

The republican and loyalist ceasefires in 1994 impacted on all sections of Northern Ireland society. In response, and under significant financial pressure from the British Government, the RUC instigated its own 'Fundamental Review' in 1996. While the Review made 189 recommendations for change, it stayed firmly distanced from the symbolic issues of name, badge and flag, and even more so the concrete issues of recruitment and reform of the covert 'force within a force' that had made up the RUC's 'Special Branch' (Murphy 2013).

The ceasefires also kicked off a period of intense political negotiation that culminated in the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998. Policing itself was regarded as too divisive an issue to be explicitly included in the 'Talks' process. Instead, the Agreement provided for the establishment of an independent commission to look specifically at police reform. The Commission was chaired by the Right Honourable Chris Patten, CH, the last British Governor of Hong Kong and a former UK Cabinet Minister. The Commission reported in September 1999 and made 175 recommendations which were, in general, very similar and informed by those of the RUC's own internal fundamental review. Where they differed substantially and controversially was the proposal for a change of name, badge and uniform, for the introduction of 50/50 recruitment (50% Roman Catholic and 50% other) in an attempt to rebalance organisational membership and a new focus on human rights and policing with the community. The British Government's general acceptance of Patten's Report against the opposition of Northern Ireland's unionist majority lit the torch paper on the pace of change. In response, the RUC leadership accepted the Reports' recommendations and in September 1999 appointed a Change Manager and a change team. The organisational response began in earnest.

### **A Note on the Process Lens Perspective**

Within any processual analysis of change and strategy, it is accepted that it is not possible to understand the *process* of change without an analysis of the *context* in which change occurs (Pettigrew 1990, Pettigrew 1997, Dawson 2003a, Pettigrew

2012). The large and varied nature of the literature leaves a wide body of work to draw on, but a difficult landscape to navigate. Existing work relevant to this study includes that which looks particularly at change in large complex public sector organisations and especially police organisations (Duncan, Mouly et al. 2001, Feltes 2002, Densten 2003, Ellison 2007, Pettigrew 2012). The RUC experience as explored here is an examination of 'radical' organisational change - a transformatory shift from one organisational form to another (McNulty and Ferlie 2004). The political and environmental circumstances of the change process meant that the research relied heavily on a processual approach which seeks to convey the 'embeddedness' of the organisation in its political, social and historical context (Pettigrew, Ferlie et al. 1992). Such concerns tie in with Greening and Gray's (Greening and Gray 1994) comment that the polarisation of perspectives on organisational change have recently given way to the interaction of choice and context when looking at organisational change processes. One of the most significant points in adopting such an analytical approach is the realisation and acceptance that 'real life' policy formulation and implementation are interactive and muddled, and researchers should resist the temptation to seek to resolve such tensions (Pettigrew 1990, Dawson 2003a, Mintzberg 2007).

### **Methodology and Analysis**

The research consisted of over seventy transcribed interviews, some amounting to over ten thousand words as well as an extensive research diary, organisational documentation and extensive secondary source material. Forty five of these interviews were with individuals who presently or who have previously served in the RUC / PSNI. Two were Chief Constables, two Deputy Chiefs, ten at ACC level, eight had reached the rank of Chief Superintendent and ten the rank of Superintendent. The remaining ten were at Inspector level or below. The remaining twenty five interviews were with individuals around policing, including oversight bodies like the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Office of the Oversight Commission, those who had worked with the police as change facilitators and those who were deeply critical of the policing process from a political or community

representative perspective or those who were supportive. No one of note refused to be interviewed, although some did require significant persuasion and reassurance about anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews took place over an extended period of almost ten years and many individuals were interviewed more than once over that timeframe. Data analysis was carried out through generally advocated techniques of data reduction: with the case narrative attempting to provide open contextual descriptions of the dynamic change process (Miles and Huberman 1994, Dawson 2003b, Pettigrew 2012). A chronology of intra-organisational events was constructed and compared, then merged with a chronology of events external to the organisation to determine further links and interactions between context and process.

A longitudinal approach was adopted. The period covered begins in 1996 with the RUC's own 'Fundamental Review' and ends in 2012 with the PSNI embroiled in a Public Accounts Committee Enquiry into the '*Retire and Rehire*' controversy and the appointment of the present Chief Constable. The timeframe covers a period of 18 years that have been some of the most fast-paced in Northern Ireland's recent history. In terms of coincident time cycles, this period included a series of elections, the annually recurrent and fraught loyalist order marching disturbances, and significant (decision making) party political conferences, four different Chief Constables and a complete change in the police senior command team. It also saw the devolution of Policing and Justice to the Northern Ireland Executive. Temporal bracketing (Smith and Elliott 2007, Langley, Smallman et al. 2013) was used to identify and demarcate change phases and a conjectural reasoning approach (Plowman, Baker et al. 2007, Buchanan and Denyer 2013) was employed in an effort to disentangle causal complexity and take into account systematic factors, the development of processes overtime and the impact of individuals on development.

### **Change Phases and Key Themes**

Four major phases can be identified in the RUC – PSNI change journey. The first, can be termed the *‘Tipping point’* and looks at the period after the initial paramilitary ceasefires leading up to and including the Belfast Agreement and the consultation around a new start to policing. It may seem strange to start talking about change before much has happened, but this period – relatively short as it was – defines much of what happened next in the organisation’s journey. The Second Phase *‘Implementation, Symbolic Modification and Resistance’* covers the initial period of symbolic change around the name and the crest. This is the timeframe between the Patten Report of 1999 and the resignation of Sir Ronnie Flanagan as Chief Constable in 2002. The Third Phase *‘Power Assisted Steering’*; covers the appointment of Hugh Orde as Chief Constable and comes to a close with the significant decision of Sinn Féin to take up their seats on the Northern Ireland Policing Board in 2007. The Fourth and last phase *‘A Return to Turbulence’* takes us from that point, through a resurgence in the dissident republican campaign, controversies around the rehire of retired officers and the appointment of the present Chief Constable, George Hamilton. What we also see within these ‘temporally bracketed’ phases is the interaction of four significant themes that ebb and flow as the change progresses.

### **Emergent Themes: Leadership, Resourcing, Pace and Sequencing and External Change Agents**

***Table 1 here***

#### ***Adaptive Leadership through the Phases***

*I think Flanagan was a very charismatic leader and I think he was able to nurse the organisation through what I think were very painful times for a lot of people, like he went on publicly and spoke of his sadness about the name change and what it meant to him – that resonated with a lot of the rank and file (Senior PSNI Officer 11/4/12).*

As many suggest, when focusing on leadership there is an enormous temptation to look for unblemished hero figures: the charismatic leader driving through change within an organisation (Conger and Kanungo 1998, Kakabadse and Kakabadse 1999, Mintzberg 2007). However, as we move into a 'post heroic' age (Gronn, 2002) we see leadership as a concept but also as a set of behaviours, often distributed throughout the organisation and not the preserve of the top team, CEO, or Chief Constable. Recent work on complex systems and organisational change identifies adaptive leadership behaviours as a key determinant in impactful change processes (Uhl-Bien, Marion et al. 2007, Goldstein, Hazy et al. 2010). When we look at the RUC - PSNI case, we can see adaptive leadership at multiple organisational levels ebbing and flowing throughout the identified phases. The interview extract above illustrates the generally held view in the organisation about the personal importance of Sir Ronnie Flanagan, the Chief Constable at the beginning of the change process. This is something we see as significant in the first and second phases of change, especially around radical change on emotive organisational symbolism. Characteristics of adaptive leadership can also be seen at other levels. Structurally, there is a clear leadership hierarchy engaged, and that stays fairly stable throughout the process as would be expected in this organisation type. However, change drivers and change resisters were also operating, and the key task of adaptive leadership at was to keep the process both steady and moving forward.

It was clear that Flanagan's approach to leading through such a difficult and complex period was conscious, nuanced and built upon activities at other levels. In his unwavering defence of the organisation externally and his internal challenge to his members, he set the tone for how the organisation would move ahead. By reinforcing continually the aims of the process alongside the length of time it would take, and negotiating successfully on severance, Flanagan presented the organisation with a path to follow, which, while difficult, was at least perceivable. As we move through the next change phases and especially phase three '*Power Assisted Steering*' we see a new Chief Constable (Sir Hugh Orde) after an initial period of uncertainty, begin to devolve the change outwards and downwards throughout the



stiff structural hierarchy facilitating opportunities for emergent development. We can see the development of this phase reflected in the two quotes below – one from a senior Human Resource professional within the PSNI and another from Orde himself, as he reflects on his perception of how the ongoing change and engagement process developed:

*I don't think that despite his appearance he was all too comfortable in those first two years, it was quite rocky. He developed very quickly, I think he was pretty suspicious of those of us who were here.....And I don't think he understood the political dynamic of Northern Ireland and how hyper critical people were of policing. He had a much more collegiate style of management after the first two years, after 'you will do, you will do, you will do,'. He realised that that could be quite isolating and began to trust us. (Senior HR Professional 5/4/12).*

*The most inspirational stuff came from the most junior officers. Always. It was important to give a very clear message from the Chief that you can get on with this now. Direct.... If you do the right thing rather than doing things right because we have some silly policy that is getting in your way, I'll support you....There is something about the Chief talking direct to staff. (Interview with Sir Hugh Orde 2/5/12).*

As we move through phase three and into phase four we again see a change in the external environment which becomes more hostile with renewed, intensive pressure from paramilitaries and an increasingly unstable political environment pitching police into the heart of disputes around parades, protests and the legacy of the past. A new Chief Constable – Sir Matt Baggott is motivated by a generalised community policing agenda but struggles to come to terms with the highly political and volatile space into which he is trying to insert community policing objectives. This tension sees a return to a more traditional, hierarchical style of leadership, a

move away from emergent adaptive approaches. One external commentator engaged in work around policing development in Northern Ireland commented of Chief Constable for much of this phase, Sir Matt Baggott :

*He doesn't get the politics. He doesn't take the time to understand the politics. There is a disconnect between leadership needed and what there is. It doesn't take many incidents for the confidence in the Chief Constable to erode - McGurks bar, Loughinisland, HET<sup>i</sup>. He conveys an arrogance which is completely misplaced.*  
*(Policing Commentator – 12/4/12).*

### ***Resourcing as a constant***

*... there were two budgets for change, ... severance and non severance so there was a set figure for severance, £280 million, it was a massive amount of money ... Anything to do with severance – the money was there. But non-severance, I remember being asked one Saturday morning, will you go into work at 8am, and meet X and Y and Z and what I had to do was to take 175 recommendations of Patten and by lunch time give a figure of how much it would cost. (Senior PSNI Officer 11/4/12)*

When we think about change incentives, we tend to look at a range of financial and non-financial mechanisms that facilitate the 'unfreezing' of existing organisational processes (Lewin 1951, Wruck 2000). One of the unusual aspects of the RUC - PSNI change process, especially in the middle phases, was the reliance on a particular method of financial incentive in order to 'kick start' the change - voluntary severance - and the absence of any additional performance incentives for those who chose to stay. The reasons for this are clear: the RUC PSNI was a public sector organisation in the midst of a turbulent period of social and political change. While the British Government (the funding source) implicitly recognised that the peace

process and policing change would incur a substantial financial outlay, it was also aware of the potentially huge savings it could make if security costs in Northern Ireland dropped, as they would in a relatively peaceful situation. So while the UK Treasury could be persuaded of the need to front-end a large financial commitment, the public service nature of the sector largely prevented any opportunity for financially incentivising change for those who stayed in the organisation, rather than just for those who chose to leave. One unusual aspect of the RUC - PSNI change process is the very significant financial resources available to those managing the process, and particularly the resources which were made available as part of the voluntary severance process. These costs are defined by the organisation as 'Patten non-severance' and 'Patten-severance' expenditure. Patten non-severance expenditure was used to *'take forward the implementation of ...Patten related business cases'* (PSNI 2002).

By dissipating the power of the 'securocrats' and the old guard, and in this instance power can be defined as the ability to influence effectively the behaviour of others (French and Raven 1959), severance fundamentally altered the power dynamics within the organisation and laid the foundations for the change process to progress. Given the political risks that had been taken in the wider process and the difficulty getting political movement on many areas of concern around policing, it would have been surprising if the change process had been allowed to flounder through lack of resources. We have seen above the degree to which the organisation was financially resourced to facilitate the change. Existing internal resources (such as IT capability and even moral) were however, low. Financial resources went some way to fill those gaps. One interesting negative and unanticipated consequence of voluntary severance, which the organisation now needs to grapple in phase four is the impact of officers being pulled 'up' the ranks more quickly than ability might have dictated, and a consequent legacy of years with few promotions or organisational movement. As one senior PSNI officer comments:

*I also think that because of the 'suck through' from Patten, we also promoted a lot of people early; I think we will rue that. We promoted people who shouldn't*

*be promoted. But we also created a sense of entitlement. There is an expectation of promotion and then all of a sudden we've shut the door. (Senior PSNI Officer – 17/4/12)*

### ***Pace and Sequencing unexpected complex***

Commentators on the sequencing of change processes are generally consistent in stressing the importance of establishing a sense of urgency in terms of change itself, forming guiding coalitions and developing and communicating a vision (Kotter 1996, Moss Kanter 1999). While the RUC-PSNI case is generally consistent in sequencing in relation to these models, in two areas the case diverges sharply. The fact that much of the 'pace' of the process was determined by outside forces meant that when severance became a facilitative mechanism for employee turnover, these external forces (generally lack of political support in nationalist communities) also significantly stalled the recruitment of new officers and put considerable pressure on the process in its early stages. While a guiding coalition internally may have been established early, the lack of a coalition externally created real operational problems. Given the intensity of the organisation's relationship to its context, this was a major omission, but to some extent outside the organisations control, as the interview extract below illustrates:

*In a sense you sometimes end up fighting a battle on two fronts ... what you also have is a hinterland of retired police officers and political parties happy to roll in behind them. (Senior RUC Officer 1/3/2004)*

More interestingly, Kotter's (1996) well known advice to create a sense of urgency to spark initial momentum was not followed. Indeed, looking at what the RUC leadership was communicating internally at the early stages of the process, Flanagan, was doing the opposite: consistently talking down the change and reassuring officers of the security of their own prospects and the importance of the organisation to the future of NI. It is important to remember Pettigrew's (2003) assertions on the significance of political skills and the overwhelming importance of

context. In an already feverish political atmosphere, where rumours were rife and voices of injured and widowed were being heard loudly within the organisation, the last thing that was required was any more urgency, especially in phases one and two. Rather reassurance, emotional empathy and a holding period allowed the organisation and its members to become accustomed to the idea of change, without needing to do much about it. Some of those interviewed were critical about the slowness of this initial period and what they regarded as the stifling role played by the Top Team at this time. However, when change did happen, it was rapid. This is particularly evident around the issues of name and symbols.

While in hindsight, the internal ‘pacing’ of the early phases of the process appear careful, risk averse and considered, the later part of phase two is rapid and fast moving. Given the challenges that faced the organisation at that time and the intense external pressure under which it was operating (as well as operational pressures from ongoing community disorder), the gentle initial pacing seems to have been a leadership response to unsettling external events which may have led to organisational instability. The need for the leadership (and in particular for the Chief Constable) to simultaneously act as a defender of tradition and an innovator for change is also apparent. This was evident through the layers of leadership. In this the sequencing and pacing adopted appears to be as appropriate as it could have been at the time.

### ***The Role of External Change Agents as a critical thread***

Ford and Ford (Ford and Ford 1995) comment that intentional change occurs when “*a change agent deliberately and consciously sets out to establish conditions and circumstances that are different from what they are now and then accomplishes that through some set or series of actions and interventions either singularly or in collaboration with other people*” (Ford & Ford 1995: 543). Change agents are usually defined within the literature as either a subset of internal leaders (Pettigrew and

Whipp 1993, Stace and Dunphy 1995) or external agents who are often consultants brought into to facilitate the process (Buchanan and Boddy 1992). These agents are regarded as having significant legitimate power, which they can use to motivate the change process (Buchanan & Badham 1999; Pettigrew & Whipp 1991). The change agent's themselves are defined as those who facilitate change in the particular area in which it is needed (Buchanan and Boddy 1992). The political role and political activity of the change agent is of particular relevance within a number of process phases, especially in the early stages (Pettigrew: 2003).

*I figured that one of the things we were going to be doing was going to be viewed as a very political act and I needed to demand of them that they treat us as seriously as they could and therefore I said to Ronnie Flanagan, if I need you I'll ring you, if I want to see you, I have see you, and he agreed. (Mediation Professional 19/4/2004)*

The RUC had an unusually closed organisational culture (Brewer 1991). But the intensely political nature of the process, the involvement of external agents for change – particularly those with a community relations / conflict transformation focus - and also the degree of international exchange which was involved, meant that others from outside the organisation played a role in the 'thought leadership' within it. Five different types of external influencers can be categorised. The first can be recognised as 'academic'. It contains two distinct types of engagement processes: academics who were sought out and engaged by the then RUC itself, in a consultancy and advisory role and academic practitioners with an interest in practice who were also engaged in studies of conflict, community division / good relations, parading and crowd control. This second group of influencers can be identified as 'community relations and mediation focused'. While there is some cross over between the two groups in this first category, it is important to note that whilst the former were generally inwardly focused, the latter is mostly populated by those who have a practitioner interest in the development of better relations and the organisational consequences of the Northern Ireland conflict on service delivery and

the implementation of public policy, and were therefore outward looking. Both were vital. These community relations and mediation practitioners largely engaged with the active aim of fostering change and developing relationships both within the organisation and with the organisation and the wider community. The third notable category of external agents is that of commercial consultants engaged by the then RUC in the early phases for their specific skills, for example outsourced public relations support to enable them to deliver key messages to a wider audience. External consultants were also used to manage the new 50 / 50 recruitment system, among other functions. The last identifiable category is that of external political agents who engaged with the police to further their own objectives. This included representatives from the political parties, and especially the nationalist parties. Again we see this engagement intensely within early phases, but as a stable and continuing form of engagement and change driver. Different levels of political engagement were evident – from the highest level in both the British and Irish governments to locally elected councillors and later members of the NI elected Assembly. It was not however, an easy relationship at times, as it often went to the heart of the most emotive issues in the change process. One senior officer reflected upon the difficulties:

*I remember the Secretary of State {for Northern Ireland} at the time Peter Mandelson coming when I was District Commander and people refusing to be in the room when he was in it, because he was seen as the sell out guy, or one of the sell out guys. Those 20% of people - there were always difficulties with them and that's why it was important that Patten created a way out for them, to exit. Because it would have been somewhat poisonous in the organisation. Senior PSNI Officer (25/ 4/ 12).*

### **The RUC - PSNI Case and Lessons for Policing Change**

The RUC - PSNI case is an unusual one, in the general area of police transition and reform processes. It also represents an 'extreme' case, and one which like many

such cases, allows us to identify interactions and interconnections which can then illuminate less polemic environments (Eisenhardt 1989, Yin 1993, Mintzberg 2007, Pettigrew 2012). Heavily resourced both financially and in relation to the personal, political and intellectual capacity of those involved, it was also a crucial part of the wider Northern Ireland peace process and the lynchpin for the wider reform of justice infrastructure (Murphy, 2013). However, while much academic commentary exists on policing as an externally observed phenomenon, this paper reflects the findings of a long term processual research project on the transition which offers a longitudinal, temporally bracketed, perspective on the change and a distillation the most significant factors that enabled the change process to be effective. This is significant, given the high degree of failure among organisational change generally, and the particular difficulties of change in police organisations (Chan 1996, Zhao, He et al. 1999, Mulcahy 2000, Manning 2005). The findings of this research encourage a greater consideration of both the management of change within police organisations facing significant political intervention and also the factors that influence change in a much broader police context.

The themes of 'leadership', 'resources', and 'pace and sequencing' were crucially important to an explanation of the RUC - PSNI change experience. These themes also appear regularly within the wider literature on strategy and policing reform, and the findings underline much of the existing research in pinpointing the significance of context to a coherent understanding of change within organisations (Butler 2003). However, the important role of external agents is less well covered in the policing literature, and is particularly significant within an evolving political environment, where relationships externally are significant (Manning 2003, Hoque, Arends et al. 2004, Maguire and King 2004). This is usefully shown in the context-laden interventions of the community relations and mediation professionals in the RUC-PSNI case. Within the case, interview respondents again and again emphasised the significance of this involvement and the role of some of these agents as 'touchstones' for the process. In this respect, the research adds a new dimension to our understanding of how complex and difficult change processes can be affected by



the intervention of other agents acting independently but with a progressive agenda to advance the process. The experience of the external agents in the RUC - PSNI case was at times difficult and challenging for all involved. At one point one set of external agents withdrew entirely because of concerns that they would be regarded as partisan and conflicted through one of the worst periods of civil disturbance in the peace process. In general though, the intervention provided a useful and additional set of 'scaffolding' to hold the change process in place, while a new organisational reality was constructed. This was crucial to 'mediating' the relationship between the internal strategic processes within the organisation and the volatile external environment.

The research also contributes to our knowledge of the strategy formulation under environmental pressure, and the interactions of organisational strategies with their context. It underlines the significance of top-team leadership as a bridge between strategy and delivery and the significance of resources as a change lever. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel comment that 'power relations surround organisations; they also infuse them' (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand et al. 2001). The RUC - PSNI case can be read as a distinct illustration of the use of power both within an organisation to drive through a change process but also between an organisation and its political environment to create the conditions in which change becomes the only option. This duality between internal and external processes is rarely focused on in police research, although the dimension of power is a common concern. This research adds to our understanding of the complex interactions between change strategies internally, and the pressures that extreme external contexts represent.

It also adds to an understanding of the interaction between political processes and public sector organisations. Change under political pressure is not an uncommon phenomenon, but is rarely explored. In terms of policing change, the RUC - PSNI case is unusual, but not entirely alone. Recent research on change within policing contexts has centred on the implementation of 'policing with the community' strategies (Maguire and King 2004), evolving to a new language of 'community

safety' (Skogan 1995, 2012). While community policing / human rights and representative policing methodologies represented the core delivery aspect of the RUC – PSNI change agenda, the process went much further than that, encompassing a transformational change process from one organisational state to another. This is an unusually comprehensive shift for a policing organisation within a stable democratic state, but one which is not without precedent. Conversely, South Africa, Iraq, Palestine, Bosnia and Afghanistan all spring to mind as states within which policing organisations are at various points in much wider political transition processes. Indeed, if impartial policing is the lynchpin of democratic governance (Ellison: 2007), then the reform of policing within societies under transition is a core component of institutional change. This research provides a glimpse inside a policing organisation undergoing such change, temporally brackets the development of the process and identifies core considerations within it. The first is unequivocal overarching political support. Research in Israel has shown how lack of political support (among other things) fatally undermined a policing change process (Weisbund, Shalev et al. 2002). In Northern Ireland the situation was the reverse, with the political infrastructure (in terms of the two governments) firmly behind the change process, and the wider political infrastructure designed to support it. The second important lesson is the significance of independent oversight both as a change lever and a quality / progress check. The Oversight Commission gave the internal change team a leverage point (and enabled the change team to say '*it's not us, its them..*'). It also gave those outside a firm evaluative mechanism with which to measure change – crucial for political and social buy-in. The third lesson is the significance of appropriate multi-level transformational leadership, and particularly leadership at the top, to act on conflict 'hot spots' and to retain organisational cohesion when change dynamics are pulling the organisation in many directions. Such leadership needs to be politically skilled and in possession of enough power to push through difficult and challenging junctures in the change process. The last lesson is the need for significant resources both to facilitate staff turnover where necessary, and to support those remaining and those engaged in the change. Such resources may be largely financial but the significance of intellectual support and

internal capacity building should not be underestimated. As the RUC - PSNI case has shown, widening horizons to new horizons can be a change motor in itself.

## **Conclusions**

The change process undergone by Northern Ireland policing was radical, transformatory, risky and ultimately regarded by some of its most significant critics as sufficiently successful to be noteworthy (Ellison: 2007). The process required careful strategic positioning within the rapidly evolving political process and visioning which was as interactive externally as it was reinforcing internally. This research identified four phases within the process and four themes which emerged from the attendant conjunctural analysis. The phases speak to the process narrative: the themes are analytical and focus on the key concerns, decisions and insights of the process.

In particular, the research would suggest that the role of external change agents is crucial to mediate the relationships between the internal strategy making process and the external environmental context, when an organisation is under political pressure and facing radical internal change. This experience of policing change in political turbulence is not unique in history. But the experience of the RUC - PSNI case in successfully facing up to such challenges holds valuable lessons for such processes of transition.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> The McGurk's Bar bombing, the murders in Loughinisland and the Historical Enquiries Team were and continue to be controversial and symbolic of the difficulties inherent in 'policing the past'.